

Isabel Serna

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DHWANI GARG

I will give you a background about my thesis. It is called What is the pt? In my thesis, I explore type scale as a tool to explore various patterns, system designs for a book, and typefaces based on emotion or expression. You are a designer yourself and you focus on beautiful patterns, illustration, stationery, and product design. I wanted to know about your background, your work methodology, and how you create beautiful, colorful patterns.

ISABEL SERNA

Sure. Let's talk and tell me what you want to know.

DG

The first question is also the most obvious: Can you tell me about your background, and how would you describe what you do?

IS

I went to school for industrial design. So I'm an industrial designer. I worked at a luggage company for four years. I specialized in product design as an industrial designer and wanted to do packaging. I liked the graphic aspect of industrial design. Back in college, I liked branding and packaging as a specialization. When I was looking for a job, I found a job as a product designer, so I was fine. Working in the luggage industry is where I discovered pattern design.

As you know, as a luggage designer, I had to design the zipper pulls, handles, wheels, and the bag's look. It was a lot like figuring out fabrics for types of luggage, and one of the things that I needed to do was create the lining for the inside of the bag. I made patterns for the lining with the company's logo because it was like a business-type luggage called Travel Pro, and now it has grown a lot. They used a lot of color, but at that time, it was mainly for flight attendants and pilots and was way more professional.

I discovered patterns, and I was like, oh my gosh, what is this? I love the idea of recreating an icon or two and replicating them infinitely. I would go home and start figuring it out, and as you can see, I love colors. I would see how simple designs would look with a pop of color, how you scatter and play with them. So, I would go home and play a lot with patterns. That's how I got started; I started creating a portfolio and made a website. I eventually started to reach out to companies, and I ended up leaving that job to do all this all the time.

DG So exciting and wonderful to hear. It's always the best thing when something sparks. If you chase behind it and get to do what you love, it is always the best thing.

IS It is true that inspiration can come from anywhere. Again, I was working as a luggage designer, and I never considered myself super artsy. All my life, I have always thought I wanted to be a doctor, and I come from a family of engineers. I did anatomy, physiology, and all that for two years, but I did not really get into art at all. When I graduated as an industrial designer and started working at this company, illustration was not even like; I didn't know that there was a career as a pattern designer, and when I started playing with patterns at home, after I discovered pattern design, I was like, okay, let's see if I can draw a dog. I would draw a dog. I'm like, I can draw a dog. I would challenge myself to be like, oh, can I draw a shoe? Can I draw an umbrella and a flower? This is how I realized I could draw. I started doing that more and more, and my business grew. I do pattern and illustration now because I realized when I was 30 that I could draw.

DG It's so amazing that you can follow your passion. Color plays a crucial role in your work. When choosing colors, do you consider deeper meanings, or is it all about aesthetics? Also, what makes working with color so enjoyable or fascinating for you?

IS Yes, color is very important for me personally and for the work that I do. When you say about the name of your thesis, it is like, what is the pt? Right? And for me, I asked myself that question in a different meaning, like, what is the point of what we do? The world is difficult sometimes. What is the point of beauty? What's the point of art? I want to save the planet or whatever, like working on bigger things. I always come back to joy as an artist, illustrator, and pattern designer. At least for me, my mission and something really important for me is spreading joy and putting a smile on someone's face when they see my work or making someone feel good, happy, and cozy when they see something I created. So, color is obviously crucial—all elements of that. Also, coming from Colombia and Latin America, I think you can relate because Indian culture is so rich in color. Because of our cultures, color is ingrained in us, and it's

important for us. It's a way of expression almost. It's weird because I am very drawn to black-and-white artwork. I love it when I see someone else doing that. I tried to do that sometimes. But it's very different. Like, I just need to go to pink and yellow; it's almost a necessity. It's a way of expression.

DG I agree with you. I love working with colors, and yes, pink, of course. I always want my work to be colorful, especially coming from a place where color is everything. I always want to incorporate colors in some way or another.

IS Even if you have a neutral home, just having something yellow or pink just creates a feeling that I can't. I'm sure there are studies on that color creating feelings inside you.

DG I am circling back to what you say about people seeing your work and feeling joy. Honestly, that's how it is lively. Your collaboration with Figo Fabrics (Fig. 1) is bursting with vibrant colors—it's truly beautiful and adorable! Could you share your experience working with clients when it comes to designing patterns and selecting colors?



FIG. 1: Figo Fabrics

IS Usually, when companies approach me because they like my style, and when they see my portfolio and reach out, they already like what they see. They know what I'm about. I feel like I cannot hide it. It's definitely written all over my portfolio, and like a color lover, you won't get anything different. I've been very lucky that most clients who have approached me already have a sense of what they're getting, and they want that color. They're hiring me because of my color sensitivities. Very rarely, but it happens. Companies have their own palette or branding palette; depending on the project, you just have to play with their colors. I also ask if I can add a couple of complementary colors to see if the color palette is a little too serious or too dark. If you present your work in a way that's very authentic to you, usually the partnerships or the collaborations or companies that will come to you are going to be looking to them are going to be looking for that. So, as you talk about Figo Fabrics (Fig. I), they approached me, and I sent them some work, and they were very excited. They want it to have more color, be tropical, and be fun. And they let me be super creative. The fabric that came out of that collaboration is beautiful, vibrant, and exciting. It is because that's what they were looking for.

DG When I looked at this project, I was in awe of those colors. I believe that adding colors to the pattern makes it more lively and gives it a dimension. Is there a color that brings you joy whenever you work with it? If there is, could you share which one and why it's so special to you?

IS I have two that are like my colors. One is pink. I love pink. It definitely brings me a lot of joy. I have it around. You should see my studio; it's beautiful, filled with pink everywhere. I have noticed that about my artwork a lot. I love to do things based on, like, women's joy, like Crazy Plant Lady (Fig. II) and Dog Mom (Fig. III). Things like that are celebrating, like being like a woman and doing whatever I want. And you know, doing my life. Pink is a little bit of a celebration of womanhood for me. And it's just such a beautiful color. It's so easy to combine. And it's like soft, but strong. It has a good personality, and the other one is definitely yellow. I have a lot of yellows here, too.



FIG. II: Crazy Plant Lady Illustrated Book



FIG. III: Dog Mom Illustrated Book

DG Yellow is such a beautiful and bright color.

IS Yellow represents joy and life for me. It is warm, like a hug. Yellow is like a hug in color, so I would say those two are my main loves.

DG Do you have a pet?

IS You've probably seen him somewhere here. He's usually sleeping next to me, but he just left. His name is Charlie. He's a Frenchie. Honestly, he is my biggest inspiration, like my biggest muse. I try to sneak him into almost every project I work on. There's like a little dog sleeping in a corner or something. He's just such a joy. Dogs teach us so much about life and how to live. So, he's my favorite thing in the world.

DG Your inspiration, Charlie, is always with or surrounded by you, and it's perfect. Following up brings me to my next question: Your collaboration with the Foggy Dog (Fig. IV) is so cute! I love the colors in the accessories. Could you walk me through the process and your experience collaborating with them?



FIG. IV: The Foggy Dog Accessories

IS So with Foggy Dog (Fig IV), Charlie was a perfect combination because I'm a Dog Mom. I wrote an illustrated Dog Mom (Fig. III) book a while back. I have a lot of Dog Mom-centric designs, and in my shop, I have a lot of Dog Mom stuff. It was like a perfect company to collaborate with, and I'm trying to remember because they contacted me about something they had seen on my Instagram, like the year before or two years before. It was like a lettering piece I did.

The Foggy Dog wanted to see if I could make it a xoxo pattern for their bandanas, and oh, I have a Dog Mom patch (Fig. V) in my shop. They wanted to make that into a pattern, but instead of saying Dog Mom, it has to say something that a dog would have to do on themselves, like something that a dog really, really loves. So we came up with bacon and walks, and it was cheese or a few things that a dog would just like to adore. I created that based on what they had because they saw the work, so I modified it to match

their request. And I sent them the file. We did a couple of color modifications because they liked a sample for fabric, but the colors needed to be coming quite right. So I changed them up a bit so the colors were perfect. They paid a lot of attention to detail when it came to the colors and making sure that, again, it was like what was on the computer translated into the final product. That was it, and everything came out so beautiful. I was so excited to see it. I think as designers or especially pattern designers or illustrators, when our work, I mean, we work all day on a computer. Everything we do is very digital, but to see and hold and touch something with our designs in it, like something tangible that people are using, that people are hanging on their homes or putting on their dogs, is such a special feeling.

DG The colors and patterns are perfect, especially the bandanas. I love the pink and purple here, and I have never seen such beautiful colors in dog accessories. What's the most fun or fascinating part of your job profile?

IS Honestly, the most fun and fascinating part is what I just said about, okay, like you dream something up, you conceptualize it. When working with a company, you also send your designs and do the design process, which is always fun and exciting. The production of that design might take years before you see it out in the world. So, seeing something you designed on shelves somewhere like in Target or Hallmark or Anthropologie or what like whatever it is to see people consuming something that you did and like to have your grandma go to a shop and be like is this like, for me that is the most rewarding and best part of the job honestly, just seeing the product out and thinking about and going back to like the joy and like spreading joy feeling that, someone's like spending their money on something that is going to make them happy. Or they're going to give that someone they love, and that person will receive love and joy through something you created. That was in your head two years ago; now it is physical. So, that's the best part.

DG I love your perspective, where you mentioned watching your designs on a shelf, people buying them, and especially when your family sees them, and it brings so much joy and pride into their lives.

IS 100% honestly, I wanted to be a doctor my whole life. My parents were very excited about that, and they really couldn't understand when I changed. Until a few years ago, I didn't think my parents understood what I was doing or my career. Once they started to see products that I created, you know, out in the world, it was finally like, oh, like they got it. It was cool to see them just make those connections.



FIG. V: Dog Mom Patch

DG They are so proud of your accomplishments. If you had to pick right now, what would you say is your favorite project or the one that really pushed you out of your comfort zone?

IS It was the books either Crazy Plant Lady and Dog Mom (Fig. II and III). Crazy Plant Lady was the first book I ever did. It was a dream that I didn't even know I had or could do. So, to get offered the book and be like, I'm going to create a book from scratch, come up with all the content for the book, and illustrate the book.

I've never felt more excited but scared, too, because this is not something that's going to, you know, it's not like an Instagram story that goes away in 24 hours. It is something that is going to be around for years. Forever. You know books are like part of our history. It felt like a lot of pressure to make sure that I was creating my best, best best work. It pushed me a lot out of my comfort zone. To create more

illustrations and beautiful color combinations, I wanted to make sure that you could rip out and frame every page of the book. It was so important to me that that book was beautiful. It felt like creating like a baby, and I left input so much of my soul and heart into every single page of that book. So, that has been my most exciting and challenging project.

A few years after the Crazy Plant Lady book, I did Dog Mom, and I had Charlie, and it was so personal and fun. At the same time, I got offered Dog Mom. A few weeks after that, Charlie was diagnosed with cancer. It was really hard and yet beautiful. I had all the feelings in the world to be working on that book through Charlie's surgeries, and I also left a big piece of my soul in that book. It's so beautiful and a big piece of me as if you feel you can know me. It's an illustrated book that celebrates Dog Moms like deep or, you know, intellectual. It's such an important part of me and my work.

DG I am so sorry to hear this, but I hope Charlie is all well now. It's perfect that you can express your love for your dog in the form of a book. You created a history for Charlie and a distinct memory for a lifetime.

IS It's a project that I am proud of.

DG What tool do you use to create patterns?

IS Mostly Illustrator. I love to work in procreate because it's intuitive for me, just like drawing. Even if I work in Procreate, I try to get each icon into Illustrator, making it easy for me to create patterns in Illustrator. And so I'll just import the PNG, like a transparent background, and place them however I want. When I work in Procreate, I also like to create my patterns in Illustrator. If the project allows, like many of my florals and things like that, I want to go straight to Illustrator. Color is a significant part of my process. And it's so simple to change colors and play with, like recoloring something in Illustrator. So, the best way to work on patterns is with Illustrator.

DG It is really important to keep the tool you are best at. When working with colors and patterns, what influences you more: current trends or personal preferences that have developed over time?

IS I think personal preferences. I have a folder I keep, like a large folder now, with color combinations I see. Oh, I love this, but that folder is getting bigger and bigger. I have a lot of, like in Procreate, big patterns like swatches of different palettes that I start working on and collecting during different projects. Of course, as designers, we do have to pay attention to what's trending and, you know, what our directors are buying and what consumers want. I look up Pinterest and in stores to see if there's anything that's more trendy at the moment, but I like to be authentic to myself. I always end up gravitating to the palettes that I create in this period.

DG Pinterest has become a source of inspiration for rising designers to follow trends, lifestyles, and almost everything. This brings me to my next question. How do you know when a pattern is complete?

IS Oh my gosh, this is such a good question. As you hear artists and designers say, knowing when to stop is the hardest thing sometimes because you just want to keep doing it, and I'm very detail-oriented. I almost always want to like and do more. We also have to develop a sense of harmony and trust our eyes. So, the pattern has no major gaps or weird spaces screaming for something. But also, and I was just posting about this yesterday, I rework patterns all the time, like even things I created a month ago. I will look at them a month later and want to use this color differently. One month ago, I was not the same person I am now. It's unbelievable to think about that, but it is true we were not the same. So, I keep reworking many of my patterns, especially color, as our color sensitivities change with time. We get more sophisticated as we do more projects, work more, and have more experience. I revisit almost all of my patterns, like to do new colors, and think of new ways to make them fresh. I don't know, are they all? Are they ever done? Because I feel like in five years, I'll be revisiting the work I'm doing now and be like, Oh, God, I could have done better if I'm doing a project now or working on something out, definitely when the pattern has a good flow, when there are no weird spaces or gaps. When, when I, when it feels good when I know it's like a weird thing to say but, but sometimes it's like, it's like, it's like a puzzle. When everything is flowing the way it needs to and talking to each other the way it needs to, I'm like, okay, I'm happy. I'll revisit you in a few years and see if you need to change.

DG We are in the same boat (laughs). I am so much like you in this case. I did this project seven months ago and am working on it for my thesis. I love revisiting my project as I learn so much from my professors, and I always wish I had known this earlier and had not fixed anything.

IS We are constantly evolving. So, of course, something that you did even six months ago, you know, you're better. You're you have done more, you have more experience, you've seen more inspiration, whatever it is.

DG What's the most random skill or talent you possess that people might not know about?

IS Well, I went to Paris to study French literature. That's the skill I don't use that much, but I don't. I wouldn't say it is. Speaking French is a skill, I think. I would say speaking French is a skill that I do not feel a lot of people know I have. Um, okay, another one I just thought about, that's funny. My first my first job ever was at Boston Market. And I can carve a really incredible chicken like I am because I was the carver. And I don't cook. I hate the kitchen. I do not know anything that has to do with the kitchen.

DG Every skill is a skill that needs to stay hidden and should only be used as magic, I mean when needed (laughs).

IS Give me a whole chicken, I can slice it perfectly because that was my first job. It indeed comes in handy. Whenever we buy a rotisserie chicken or whatever I like, I get it. And then, you know, knowing that, people who know me know that I don't like cooking. But when they see me cut up a chicken, they're like, where did that come from?

DG Do you have any advice for someone like me who's using type as a tool to create patterns and hopes to eventually submit my designs for linens, like household fabrics?

IS In general, try to be true to yourself. What your mission is, right? So, for me, my mission is joy. For some people, it may be like activism. Everything will start happening, and people will come to you for your voice, what you're trying to say, and what's in your heart. So, just like be true to yourself. Number one, and more practical advice, is to take yourself and your work seriously. Like, creating a website always looks very professional. That's how you get bigger clients because they like a large client, a big corporation, or whatever. They're scared of working with someone not presenting themselves very professionally. Make sure that your portfolio and website, as well as your logo, look good and professional. Your work may be excellent, but if you're not presenting it excellently, it may get lost, like our internet social media world. Lastly, I say this a lot because it's so true. Just share, share, share, share, share, always. You never know who's watching. You never know who likes it.

I have this same feeling sometimes with social media: sometimes you just feel you're screaming into a void, and no one is listening. There's no one looking at this, but sometimes someone is, and you know, you just need one person to give you an opportunity, and then that opportunity leads to something else. Share as much as you can and tell everyone about what you're doing and what you're about. And just keep doing it, and don't get discouraged.

DG I will follow your kind advice. Thank you. Is there any exciting project you are launching soon?

IS I'm working on a project that I have yet to share that is special and yet to be announced. I'm trying to come up with a way to announce it. It's a third book that I'm really, really excited about, and I pitched to the publisher. It's a celebration of aunties like aunts. I have a niece, and she's the love of my life, too. I don't have kids, and I don't think I want to have kids. For me, being an aunt has been a special part of my life. So, I pitched the idea of creating a book, and I've been working on that. So it's going to come out next year. Again, I haven't announced that because I want the announcement to be so special that I'm still thinking about what I should do. I recorded something with my niece, but I'm very excited about that in my heart right now.

DG Oh my god. This book will be my best purchase ever. I love my niece, and I adore her. When she was six, I always wished to stay with her and have play time, but we were two countries apart. After coming to Boston, my wish has been fulfilled.

IS Aw, that is so cute. What's the name of your niece?

DG Myaraa and she live in Orlando. What's your niece's name?

IS Oh, that's so cute. Noel.

DG I am so excited for your book. I can't wait to read it with my niece.